

USDA ASPIRING LEADER PROGRAM (ALP) ONLINE AGLEARN TRAINING

Leadership is more than motivating others to perform well and engaging them in our mission. Effective leadership is a constant personal challenge requiring effective communication skills and the ability to build productive relationships and coalitions. To lead is defined as: to show the way, to influence or guide in a direction or course of action, to go first.

Through the USDA Training Officers Consortium, the USDA Virtual University now offers the **USDA Aspiring Leader Program** that is designed to assist you to identify and strengthen foundational leadership skills. The program is open to employees with a desire to pursue leadership. The program provides a basic knowledge and understanding of core leadership skills and competencies. The program is part of an overall effort to build a diverse and high performing workforce and prepare talented individuals to assume more responsibility and a leadership role at USDA. It will also introduce you to the wealth of resources available through AgLearn.

Remember, leaders are not always managers or supervisors.
Everyone in USDA can be a leader.
Begin your leadership journey here.

OBJECTIVES: The USDA Aspiring Leader Program has two main objectives:

- Enhanced understanding of the fundamental leadership competencies
- Discovering development resources for continual learning through AgLearn

INTENDED AUDIENCE: This course is for you if you are a GS 9-12 employee and:

- You aspire to be a leader
- You want to be an even better leader
- You want to learn more about continual learning resources available in AgLearn

DURATION: Approximately 8-10 hours of online learning plus other developmental activities.

COMPETENCIES: Participants will enhance these essential leadership competencies:

1. **Accountability** - Holds self and others accountable for measurable high-quality, timely, and cost-effective results. Determines objectives, sets priorities, and delegates work. Accepts responsibility for mistakes. Complies with established control systems and rules.
2. **Conflict Management** - Encourages creative tension and differences of opinions. Anticipates and takes steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations. Manages and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner.
3. **Customer Service** - Anticipates and meets the needs of both internal and external customers. Delivers high-quality products and services; is committed to continuous improvement.

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4. **Decisiveness** - Makes well-informed, effective, and timely decisions, even when data are limited or solutions produce unpleasant consequences; perceives the impact and implications of decisions.
5. **Influencing/Negotiating** - Persuades others; builds consensus through give and take; gains cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals.
6. **Team Building** - Inspires and fosters team commitment, spirit, pride, and trust. Facilitates cooperation and motivates team members to accomplish group goals.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS: The Aspiring Leader Program has four components (see component details on next pages):

1. The Competency Self-Assessment
2. Aspiring Leader Program On-Line Courses
3. Evaluation
4. Continual Learning: job aides, recommended reading, additional courses, and shadow assignment information

Be sure to include USDA Aspiring Leader in your Individual Development Plan (IDP). Resources for planning and creating IDPs are available at: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4040-410.pdf>

Be sure to coordinate with your supervisor on the time when you participate in this training to ensure that you agree on balancing your own need for training and development with work priorities. Remember that your supervisor must grant time for you to participate in training during normal duty hours, and advanced supervisory approval is required to take training outside of the normal duty hours (as required by Title 5 and the Fair Labor Standards Act).

PROGRAM COMPONENTS DESCRIPTION: Following is a description and detailed information about the components in the USDA Aspiring Leader Program.

Program Component 1 – Competency Self-Assessment

Begin your training by completing the ALP Competency Self-Assessment. This tool is based on the OPM leadership competencies, and provides an ongoing method for development by assessing your proficiency levels in various competencies and assists you in identifying areas to build your knowledge and skills. The Competency Self-Assessment is located at the following link: <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/docs/alp-competency-sa.pdf>

Program Component 2 - Aspiring Leader Program On-line Courses

This program is the beginning of your journey into the development of your leadership skills. You will explore your strengths and increase your knowledge and skills in self-management, accountability, dealing with conflict, customer service, decisiveness, influencing/negotiating, and understanding teams. After you have completed the program, there are suggestions on how to

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develop a plan to ensure that you remain focused on your next steps to continually grow and develop as a leader.

The following courses must be complete to receive credit for the program.

Accountability

Professionalism, Business Etiquette, and Personal Accountability (1hr)

Emotional Intelligence

Using Emotional Intelligence on the Job (1hr)

Conflict Management/Customer Service

Workplace Conflict: Strategies for Resolving Conflicts (1hr)

Decisiveness

Overcoming the Barriers to Decisiveness – (1hr)

Influencing and Negotiations

Negotiation Essentials: Communicating (1hr)

Team Building

Leading Teams: Building Trust and Commitment (1hr)

Diversity

Managing a Diverse Team (1hr)

Next Steps

Leadership Essentials: Creating Your Own Leadership Development Plan (1hr)

GETTING STARTED

Find the USDA Aspiring Leader Program curriculum in AgLearn, add it to your To-Do list and then complete the survey when finished. Here's how:

1. Log into AgLearn: <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>.
2. From the **Home** page in the menu column on the right, click on the **Browse** link.
3. Once on the **Catalog Search** page, in the **Search** field type *Aspiring Leader Program*.
4. Click on the **Go** button.
5. The search results will return a list of USDA Aspiring Leader Program curriculum.
6. Scroll over the course and select **Self Assign Curriculum** on the right side of the screen.
7. After completing the entire curriculum, be sure to take the evaluation to obtain credit for the program.

Need Help? Please visit the AgLearn Job Aids web page for trouble shooting and getting started tips, or ask a Virtual University team member.

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Program Component 3 - Evaluation

After you have completed all courses, please complete the Aspiring Leader Program Evaluation. This evaluation will be added to your To-Do List after the courses have been completed in AgLearn. Completing the evaluation finalizes the curriculum and all courses should have moved to you completed work list. This evaluation is designed to measure your satisfaction as well as provide information so that we continually improve this course.

Program Component 4 – Mentoring

Identify someone to serve as your mentor to help you develop leadership skills. Select someone who is not in your chain of command who can give you helpful feedback and guidance. If you currently have a mentor, or need a mentor, you will register in the USDA Mentor Portal at: <http://www.eservices.usda.gov/usdamentoring/>. You can also register to be a mentor in this same Portal. After registering, you will be matched with a mentor based on several criteria. Once matched, you will be scheduled for mentoring training and guided on how to have an effective mentoring relationship.

Program Component 5 – Shadowing

Identify at least one leader to shadow as you are completing the program. Shadowing can include observing a leader in a variety of situations, such as at a meeting, during a conference call, giving a presentation, or running a staff meeting.

Program Component 6 – Continual Learning

This component includes recommended reading, additional courses and experiential opportunities. Component 6 is not a requirement to complete the Aspiring Leader Program, but it is recommended for your consideration in growing as a leader.

AgLearn Job Aids

The following helpful AgLearn job aids can assist you with the Aspiring Leader courses, such as:

- Trouble Shooting AgLearn Issues
- Getting Started in AgLearn
- How to get into Books 24x7
- Tips to Build Your Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Recommended Readings from Books 24X7 in AgLearn

Read the books listed and watch for announcements showing the dates/times when the Virtual University will conduct interactive webinar sessions to discuss each book.

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Coaching Yourself to Leadership: Five Key Strategies for Becoming an Integrated Leader

By Ginny O'Brien
HRD Press © 2006 (172 pages) *Citation*
ISBN: 9780874258691

Integrating competencies from three domains of leadership, this no-nonsense book provides proven practices and techniques that will transform you into a more positive, authentic leader so you can make work better for yourself and those you currently lead.

Coaching Yourself to Leadership—Five Key Strategies for Becoming an Integrated Leader

Introduction

Chapter One - Be Authentic—Work According to Your Values

Chapter Two - Be Visionary—Know Where You Want to Go and How to Get There

Chapter Three - Be Emotionally Intelligent—Build Your EQ Muscles

Chapter Four - Be Assertive—Know How to Communicate Effectively

Chapter Five - Be Connected – Build Strategic Relationships



Develop Your Leadership Skills, Revised Edition

By John Adair
Kogan Page © 2010 (88 pages) *Citation*
ISBN: 9780749455491

Full of exercises and checklists, this guide offers stimulating insights into recognizing and developing individual leadership qualities, acquiring personal authority, and mastering core leadership functions such as planning, communicating and motivating.

Develop Your Leadership Skills, Revised Edition

Introduction

Chapter 1 - What You Have to Be

Chapter 2 - What You Have to Know

Chapter 3 - What You Need to Do

Chapter 4 - How to Turn the Core Leadership Functions into Skills

Chapter 5 - How to Develop Yourself

Chapter 6 - How to Lead at the Strategic Level

Chapter 7 - How to Grow Leaders in your Organization

Appendix - A Leadership Checklist

Recommended Additional Courses

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- Search in AgLearn for key words, example: Leadership Essential, SkillSoft Government Leadership Advantage 2.0
- Access Books 24 x 7 via the “Easy Links” section on your AgLearn home page.

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Experience Opportunities

Training doesn't always have to be a formal course. Explore options from following list for additional ways to stretch and develop competencies through experiences.

- **Work groups** - serve on a special work group to use your current skills in a new environment.
- **Teams/Projects** - request to join a special team, project or assignment.
- **Focus or sensing groups** - these are a group of people who discuss their perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards a service, concept, or idea. An example of this is the chiefs sensing group: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/chief/sensing>.
- **Cross-Training** - acquire knowledge and skills from coworkers, who have similar grade levels and experiences. A new skill can make you more valuable.
- **Details** - check the USDA Detail Registry at <http://opportunities.usda.gov/> for opportunities.
- **Shadowing assignments** - These are designed to give you exposure to managerial duties, responsibilities, and to show you different approaches to handling them. It also provides exposure and experience in a different unit than your own. A shadow assignment is an important next step after completing the Online Aspiring Leader Program. Ask your supervisor for recommendations for you to engage in a shadow assignment.
- **Developmental stretch assignments** - Stretch assignments allow you to ease into leadership roles by exposing you to an array of roles and responsibilities. Stretch assignments are about getting you to expand your competencies and skills to newer, wider levels. By definition, "a stretch assignment is one that requires you to take a leap beyond your comfort zone and, in the process, pick up new skills".
- **Be a Mentor - Find a Mentor** - The mentoring process links a less experienced employee with a more experienced one to help facilitate professional growth. A mentor is someone not in your chain of command who is in a position to help with job and career issues, and who is committed to doing so. For more information on mentoring please visit the following link: [USDA Mentoring Framework brochure](#).
- **Be a Coach - Find a Coach** - Coaching is a thought provoking and creative process that inspires people to maximize their personal and professional potential. This is a method of instruction where the desired outcome is to obtain a certain level of knowledge or skills. See Marisol Rodriguez of the Virtual University for more information about coaching (email marisol.rodriguez@dm.usda.gov).
- If you are at a GS-13 through GS-15 level, consider competing to participate in the Federal-wide Interagency Rotational Program. This program is managed across Federal agencies by the Office of Management and Budget. Participants in this program spend 6 months at a developmental assignment outside of USDA. You must have supervisory

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approval to participate. For more information about this program, contact Jake Faibisch of the Virtual University (email jacob.faibisch@dm.usda.gov).

- Complete other online leadership development courses.
- Join professional organizations and volunteer to lead a group or serve as an officer.
- Participate in supervisor training.
- Serve as a representative on a special emphasis committee.

On behalf of United States Department of Agriculture employees, the Virtual University extends its sincere thanks to the Forest Service for sharing their Aspiring Leader Program Department-wide.

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SAMPLE LEARNING PLAN

Activity	Description	Estimated time	Date completed
Program Component 1: Self Assessment	Complete the Competency Self Assessment tool to assess your proficiency level and identify areas to build your knowledge and skills	30 minutes to 1 hour	
Program Component 2: Online Courses	<p>Complete the online-courses in the sequence that best suits your needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Professionalism, Business Etiquette, and Personal Accountability (1 hour) b. Using Emotional Intelligence on the Job (1 hour) c. Workplace Conflict: Strategies for Resolving Conflicts (1 hour) d. Overcoming the Barriers to Decisiveness (1 hour) e. Negotiation Essentials: Communicating (1 hour) f. Leading Teams: Building Trust and Commitment (1 hour) g. Managing a Diverse Team (1 hour) h. Leadership Essentials: Creating Your Own Leadership Development Plan (1 hour) 	8 hours	

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SAMPLE LEARNING PLAN (continued)

Activity	Description	Estimated time	Date completed
Program Component 3: Evaluation	The evaluation is attached to the curriculum in AgLearn and will added to the learner's To-Do List upon program completion	30 minutes	
Program Component 4: Mentoring	Identify someone to serve as your mentor to help you develop leadership skills	Minimum of 3 1 hour sessions	
Program Component 5: Shadowing	Identify at least one leader to shadow as you are completing the program.	Minimum of 3 1 hour sessions	
Program Component 6: Additional development (optional)	Identify additional development activities based on your interests and the results of the Competency Self Assessment	To be determined based on the activities selected	

Remember to discuss your training with your supervisor, and to request approval for the time you spend in training, as well as to include the training on your Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Growing leaders is important to us at the Virtual University. Thanks for investing time to develop your skills, and for considering a commitment to filling a leadership role in USDA, both now and in the future. Leaders provide the foundation for our success.